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Environment Department Orders Abatement Plan for Ground Water Contamination at Helena Chemical in Mesquite

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has ordered Helena Chemical to submit an abatement plan to investigate ground water pollution at the company's fertilizer facility in Mesquite, Dona Ana County. State water quality regulations give Helena Chemical 60 days to submit this Stage 1 Abatement Plan to NMED.

"I hope that this action, along with NMED's heightened enforcement activities in recent weeks, send a strong message to Helena that we are serious," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "Requiring this plan will make sure actions are taken quickly on this issue. The residents of Mesquite don't deserve anything less."

In December 2004, NMED required Helena to install three monitoring wells. Testing results from these wells have shown nitrate, total dissolved solids (TDS), fluoride, and sulfate concentrations in ground water at this site in excess of state ground water standards. Specifically, nitrate has been tested at nearly four times the state standard, fluoride at three times state health-based level, and TDS has been found at twice the standard.

New Mexico water quality regulations require responsible parties to remediate ground water pollution. The first step in this process is the submission of a Stage 1 Abatement Plan assessing ground water quality. In this case, the abatement plan will define the extent of the contamination emanating from the Helena Chemical site. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the next stage, Stage 2, of the abatement plan, which will include a proposal for cleaning up all contamination that is discovered during the assessment.

In addition to ground water concerns, NMED is also investigating air and occupational health and safety issues uncovered during recent inspections of the Helena facility.

Environmental concerns at the Helena plant were first brought to NMED's attention by complaints from the public as well as by Senator Cynthia Nava and Representative Joseph Cervantes.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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